

SOFTMACHINE

Designed for outlines

Softmachine is a new OpenType font designed to facilitate an outline stroke that is even in thickness and smoothly curved—avoiding hot spots and pointy artefacts. It does this by the shape, spacing and kerning of letters, and by using the Contextual Alternates feature to control adjacent glyph combinations.



Taking OpenType to the next level

Softmachine is a bold new font designed specifically to look great when outlined. It ingeniously exploits several features of the OpenType format to produce smooth outline typography, a popular contemporary type treatment.

“When normal fonts are outlined in applications like InDesign, Quark XPress, or Illustrator, the effect often produces pointy artefacts and doubling-up of the outline,” says Shinntype founder and designer Nick Shinn, “*Softmachine* uses OpenType to smooth out those kinks.”

Softmachine is a rounded sans-serif face of bold weight, with a large x-height, horizontally extended proportions, and ascenders that are much higher than the capitals. Although it is a single font, not a family, *Softmachine* has two variants, or Stylistic Sets as they are termed in OpenType; one is a true “clean” sans serif, and the other is in the “some serifs” genre, with full serifs on the capital I and the lower case i, j, and l, and vestigial serif-like terminals on many other glyphs.

Softmachine creates its smooth effect by means of a combination of rounded letter forms, contextual substitutions of alternate glyphs to avoid uneven spacing, and precise “almost touching” kerning, to a uniform tolerance whereby the nearest proximity of almost every character combination is identical.

While the basic alphabet of *Softmachine* is original but not radical, its premise, and the use of OpenType to modulate spacing for outlining, are a unique invention. Contextual alternates have previously been employed to make cursive script fonts appear more natural, or to simulate random variation—not for this kind of spacing control.

To a great extent, the shape and proportions of this typeface are determined not by stylistic considerations, but by the demands of the implicit outline; the short capitals, for instance, result from the need to restrict the width between horizontal stems in E and S to the default outline thickness (which is predicated as the shortest distance between adjacent glyphs—see middle *Softmachine* example on the next page).

Softmachine has a full character set for every Latin script language encoding: Western, Central European, Turkish, Baltic, Scandinavian, and Celtic.

In comparison

Sale Sale Sale

The sharp corners of a standard sans serif typeface like Arial produce obtrusive ARTEFACTS when outlined, and the varied size of negative spaces (counters) creates arbitrary, disharmonic forms in outline—note the disparate upper and lower counters of 's' in both Arial (above) and VAG (below).

Sale Sale Sale

A type like VAG Rounded is not bad for outlines, but its metrics are nonetheless configured for even color in normal setting, with the result that HOT SPOTS occur (note between 'a' and 'l' in the middle example) when outlined.

Sale Sale Sale

Softmachine differs, with its attention to the æsthetics of negative space in and between characters.

Sale Sale Sale

Stylistic alternates and metric adjustment provide optional nuancing.

Contextual alternates

ac an

'a' and 'd' have alternate feet, for preceding either straight or round.

ac an

Avoiding this kind of thing.

lc ln li

'l' has three alternate lengths of foot.

lc ln li

Avoiding this kind of thing.

to tw

't' and 'f' have alternate crossbars.

to tw

Avoiding this kind of thing.

Stylistic sets

Illubricatedly

Default: I, a, d, i, j, l, q, r, t, y

lllubricatedly

Alternate: l, a, d, i, j, l, q, r, t, y

NB: There are inconsistencies in the way in which various applications (and even different versions of the same application) implement this OpenType feature. If the menu item "Stylistic Set" is not available in the application you are using, try "Stylistic Alternates" or "Titling Alternates"—all three of these will activate Softmachine's alternate stylistic set.

All-caps feature

«Celui-ci?»

Upper & lower case

«CELUI-CI?»

All caps

The “case” (all caps) feature harmonizes punctuation within all-cap settings, by substituting alternate glyphs: note for instance the short, cap-height question mark in the above comparison.

f.f f-f f? (f) f/f

Kerning

Softmachine contains 4,884 “hard” kern pairs.

OpenType class kerning feature provides total kerning of 31,451 kern pairs.

Kerns involving non-alphabetic characters are, of course, fully covered.

Usability

Softmachine works fully with applications which support the OpenType feature specification—presently Adobe InDesign, Illustrator and Photoshop, and Quark XPress 7.

(The outlining in this document was created with InDesign and is not part of the font.)

Shinntype

Shinntype was founded in Toronto in 1999 to publish the type designs of Nick Shinn, and has since released 16 retail typeface families.

Commissioned work is also undertaken: custom typefaces have been produced for newspapers such as *The Birmingham News* (Alabama), *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Daily Express* (London), *The Daily Mail* (London), *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), *The Montreal Gazette*, and *The St. Petersburg Times* (Florida). Custom fonts, with exclusive rights, have been created for corporations such as Thomson Nelson, Enbridge, Rogers Communications Inc., and Martha Stewart Living.



The designer

Nick Shinn has lived in Toronto since 1976. During the 1980s he was an art director and creative director at a number of advertising agencies. He went digital in 1989 and started Shinn Design, specializing in publication design.

Since 1980 he has designed over 20 type families for a variety of publishers. In 1999 he went into the font business full time, launching Shinntype to publish and market his fonts worldwide.

Shinn's eclectic type designs run the gamut from revivals to experimental work exploiting new technology, and are used in everything from packaging and advertising to internet, book, magazine, and newspaper publishing around the world. He has created dozens of retail fonts, including the casual classic *Fontesque*, the unicase-monowidth "concrete poetry" face *Panoptica*, and the OpenType script *Handsome Pro*. In 2001 he was commissioned to design the *Richler* commemorative typeface. He is currently developing a suite of typefaces for international use, with Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic alphabets.

Shinn has written for magazines including *Applied Arts*, *Druk*, *Eye*, *Graphic Exchange*, and *Typographic*, has spoken at the ATypI, TypeCon and Graphika conferences, and taught at Seneca College and York University in Toronto. From 2002 to 2006 he served as a board member of the Society of Typographic Aficionados (SOTA), which puts on the international conference TypeCon every year, and brought it to Toronto in 2002.

SHINNTYPE

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